

**The Walking City is a Better City:
Promoting Human Social-Spatial Understanding
as a Foundational Framework for Urban Planning**

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Abstract

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Walking, and the agency it provides, is a fundamental part of how we as human beings process and engage the world around us. Walking is not simply a mode of transportation but a lens through which we build greater social connection and understanding. However, the current normative landscape, particularly in the United States, has assumed the primacy of the automobile in the public right-of-way and has marginalized walking as an embodied activity. Urban planning must be rooted in embodied human experience, and walkability should be seen as an ethical imperative, to refocus urban planning on the connection of human beings in cities. In this thesis, I present the effects of the automobile paradigm and the marginalization of walking in public space; I discuss theories of meaning and embodied experience in walking; and, ultimately, I explore how walking, and the greater social understanding that it can promote, moves us toward a better city.

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This thesis is dedicated to my loving mother:

EMILY CATHERINE "CATHY" MCFARLAND
1956-2015

I. Introduction

If urban planning is to be successful in the coming decades at addressing significant societal concerns, including the affordability of housing, environmental protection and restoration, economic development, regional transportation connectivity, social inequalities, and a multitude of issues, then we as urban planners must recognize the importance of embodied, social-spatial understanding and connections in public space and allow this to inform the foundation of our values and practice.

The city is a place where people interact. That interaction has built and will continue to build into the vibrancy, the aspiration, and the trajectory of humankind. In recent times, an automobile-centered paradigm has damaged the social, interactive potential of the city and has marginalized the human ability to walk. We have removed critical interactions from our public streets and have created buffers and bubbles of land and of vehicles that allow for a sanitized, protected, and numbed existence in our modern built environments.

This current paradigm in American culture (and in many societies globally) has positioned walking as a lesser or deviant form of transportation and that pedestrians, in many cases, are transgressive users of the street when they impose on the assumed primacy of automobile users in the public right-of-way. This normative landscape has shaped our sense of what is right and “common sense”. We operate in a society greatly influenced by the automobile, one that has molded urban environments to make walking very difficult or dangerous. For decades, pedestrians have been marginalized by the street, systematically and culturally viewed with disdain or indifference.

The existing assumptions around automobile-centric streets and land use are shifting. A large body of work exists analyzing the automobile, the pedestrian, and their

technical implications on urban planning practices, but it is critical to view this paradigm shift away from automobility as having social and ethical importance as well. We must understand how walking can inform the decisions that planners (and other professionals involved directly in shaping the built environment) make in a whole range of issues that affect the lived experience of people, and we should not only view walking as a topic of technical expertise or scientific inquiry. Pedestrian counts, models of walking behavior, and attempts to quantify and reduce walkability to a neat and controllable set of principles fall short of capturing the diversity and meaning found in the real, embodied experience of people who walk.

Ultimately, I argue that urban planning must be rooted in a deeper understanding of humanness and of the ways in which cities foster social interaction and build social understanding within the spatial reality of the built environment. We must recognize that the current urban structure has marginalized walking as an embodied activity. Walking, and the agency it provides, is a fundamental part of how we as human beings process and engage the world around us. The segregation and isolation of automobile-dependent environments impedes human connection; walking is a means of rebuilding that connection and of centering our concern on the lived experience of human beings. Walking is not simply a mode of travel but a lens through which we form a detailed picture of humanity and of the environment around us, thereby building greater social understanding. Walkability is therefore an ethical imperative for urban planners, in order to expand societal and personal understanding for “the greatest number of people” and to reconnect the marginalized places of society.

In the following chapters, I will present the effects of the automobile paradigm on people and the urban environment; I will discuss how walking has become a negative and marginalized use within public space; I will explore theories of the

meaning and embodied experience of walking; and I will finally describe how walking, and the greater social understanding that it can promote, ultimately leads to a better city.

II. Consequences of an Automobile Paradigm



(Spratt 2015)

Before addressing the social benefits that walking can provide a city and its inhabitants, it is necessary to first discuss the impact that automobile cultural dominance and automobile-centric built environments have had on the walking experience. Within American society, and globally, much of the urban environment has been given over to space for the automobile; hypermobility and congestion (two competing phenomena) have become the norm; and the safety, environmental, and social impacts of the automobile have been tolerated for decades.

In “Contemporary Public Space”, Matthew Carmona offers ways of categorizing and viewing modern public spaces. One of the spaces he describes is “invaded space”, public space that is used largely for the movement of private cars (2010, p. 127). He argues that spaces like these greatly affect the walking experience and the ability to engage in the social function of streets. In using automobiles, “movement between the fragments becomes a purely movement experience rather than a movement and social experience” (p. 127). Large roads dedicated to automobile traffic both “slice up” and

divide the urban environment and remove users away from each other, physically, socially, and psychologically, into their own cars in order to be able to navigate this “sliced up” landscape.

Myth of the Automobile as Primary, Apolitical, and Inevitable

Many scholars (see for instance Vanderbilt 2008, Moran 2005, Bonnett 1996, Sclar 2014) have challenged the dominant position of the automobile within the use of the street, with regards to its effect on marginalized communities and users, and considering its broader impacts on regional spatial organization and built form. The primacy of the automobile as the accepted, dominant use of the public street and as a necessary use of private property (i.e. for parking lots) has been in place for many decades not only in the United States but in much of Europe, and increasingly in Asia and other rapidly growing global regions.

The deference of streets and the larger built environment to the automobile is viewed as apolitical and as common sense (Moran 2005). However, in reality, streets can be highly political and contested spaces, particularly if any actions are taken or policies are established which affect the automobile and the free flow and function of motor vehicle users. The use of streets can lead to some of the most highly politicized debates in urban regions.

Changes to existing street and traffic systems, such as congestion charging, newly imposed speed limits, speed humps, and reallocation of the right-of-way for users other than drivers, are often fought with strident opposition and with rhetoric that frames these changes as creating extreme burden on everyday people. In a modern, neoliberal context, these hyperbolic arguments are used by politicians and the media to frame changes to automobile traffic operation as draconian, bureaucratic efforts to

remove personal freedoms and as “unreasonable interventions into the free movements of ‘ordinary people’” (Moran 2005, p. 76). Joe Moran, a British social and cultural historian who has focused on the study of everyday life practices, describes the nature of broad opposition to traffic management efforts:

The common feature of this resistance, which tends to cut across political affiliations precisely because it is seen as apolitical, is its valuing of personal freedom over social cost: its overriding assumption is that, left to the well-meaning improvisations of the individual motorist, the traffic will sort itself out of its own accord. In this realm of the depoliticized everyday, in which individual costs are obvious but social benefits are diffuse and debatable, everyone can claim to be an expert... This confidence [in vernacular expertise] has been reinforced in the last few decades by a growing emphasis in the media on neo-liberal notions of personal libertarianism and the freedom to escape an intrusive public sphere through privatized consumption. (Moran 2005, p. 77)

With the elevation of the driver and the marginalization of the pedestrian, it is this championing for the rights of the “common man” and defense of automobile-mobility as the “common sense” approach to organizing the modern transportation system that makes any sort of change to the status quo seem irrational or purposefully subversive to the orderly operation of society. Interestingly, we seem to have a “cultural confusion about the relationship between the individual freedom of driving and the collective horror of traffic congestion” (Moran 2005, p. 65). Regardless of whether congestion is inevitable or not, we simply devise ways to cope with congestion rather than actively champion for communities that would allow us to get around without a car. At the end of his book, *Still Stuck in Traffic*, after exploring ways to lessen congestion with demand pricing, parking surcharges, and even some more progressive approaches such as urban growth boundaries and by increasing densities and transit, Anthony Downs sadly relents to congestion and automobile:

Therefore, my advice to American drivers stuck in peak-hour traffic is not just to become politically involved [to fight congestion] but also to learn to enjoy congestion. Get accustomed to it! Get a comfortable, air-conditioned car with a stereo radio, a tape player, a CD player, a hands-free telephone, perhaps a fax

machine and a microwave oven, and commute with someone you really like. Then regard the moments spent stuck in traffic simply as an addition to your leisure time. (Downs 2004, p. 354)

Whether or not Downs meant to be tongue-in-cheek, this statement is acquiescence to the dominance of the automobile in our lives. His final piece of advice, to simply do your best to make a bad situation bearable, while fighting to ease congestion to make your drive easier, demonstrates an unfortunate surrender to the normative primacy of the automobile.

This sort of modal deference is evident in the traffic laws and driving culture of the United States. For instance, while motor vehicles can turn right on a red light if the receiving lane is clear, pedestrians who cross the street when the signal is still on the “red hand”, even when no vehicles are coming, are technically committing an infraction. While not ever adopted, there have been efforts in the past in the United Kingdom to enact “left on red” rules to allow similar flexibility in the signal system as exists in the United States (Moran 2005). These efforts “suggest that even in Britain the redness [and meaning] of a traffic light is open to negotiation, particularly when political parties wish to present themselves as the ally of the individual motorist against inflexible bureaucracy” (Moran 2005, p. 74). These laws in America and efforts elsewhere are exemplary of the non-absolute nature of traffic management. Signs, signals, and pavement markings only maintain the meanings that we give them, and they are efforts to rationalize the difficulties of interaction between motor vehicles and other users of the street. In Seattle, while not typical of all American cities, pedestrians are allowed to cross at any intersection, even unmarked crossings, unless a sign, signal, or barrier states otherwise (“Pedestrian Program” 2015). However, culturally, many motorists still view this as an offense.

Hypermobility and Trade-Offs

In an American society structured around the near-exclusive use of the automobile, we subconsciously accept issues such as road rage, safety risks, and social disconnection as acceptable trade-offs in exchange for an automobile-provided “hypermobility”, which is defined as “faster and faster speeds as a necessary part of a life of increasing distances” (Vanderbilt 2008, p. 274).

Since the proliferation of the automobile, the dominant paradigm has been “mobility”, that is to provide fast connections between great distances and dispersions of human settlement. However, there is a growing shift in how transportation should be viewed and provided in urban areas. Contemporary transportation planning thought is reorganizing around the concept of “access”. Strong access is based on the co-location of diverse activities and through bringing people together. Furthermore, “access” draws on a fundamental assumption about the purpose of cities: “Cities are about people meeting and interacting with one another. The greater the number of meetings, the more diverse the participants and the richer the quality of the interactions, the more vibrant and productive is the city” (Sclar and Lonroth 2014, p. 1). Automobility and its accompanying land use patterns have inhibited the kinds of interactions that Sclar and Lonroth argue are necessary to improve and further urban life. Furthermore, “in high-income cities, an overreliance on automobile-based mobility contributes significantly to traffic congestion, pollution and climate change as well as increased segregation between social classes leading to the gradual erosion of social and even economic stability” (Sclar and Lonroth 2014, p. 4). This minimization of social interaction has dehumanized our understanding of places and the people who inhabit them.

While acknowledging that levels of mobility faster than walking will continue to be critical in increasingly-populated, polycentric regional cities, investments of limited

financial resources in high-capacity transit would provide necessary alternatives for regional mobility while at the same time promoting greater walkability and land use diversity throughout a region. As walkable access and co-location of activities is increased, it further improves the function of these non-automobile mobility options. It feeds into a positive cycle of access and mobility supporting one another, instead of automobile-mobility which limits the urban social interactions that are critical to strong access.

The Impact of the Automobile to Body and Mind

Safety, which is a primary motivator behind much of traffic engineering practice, is beginning to be reframed, not with automobile hyper-mobility and margins of error as the accepted standard, but with a recognition of the fallibility of humans, the vulnerability of certain users, and the dangerous and life-threatening consequences of imperfect decisions made at high speeds. For example, “Vision Zero”, is a strategy focused on roadway design, education, and enforcement to reduce traffic fatalities and serious injuries to zero. First developed in Sweden in the 1990s, Vision Zero has been spreading globally, recently being adopted in large American cities, including New York City, San Francisco, and Seattle (“Vision Zero” 2015). Even this kind of effort, however, needs to be expanded beyond safety and instead begin focusing more on the social implications of our transportation system.

In response to skepticism and criticism from people who view zero traffic fatalities and zero serious injuries as a naïve and unattainable goal, a colleague of mine at the Seattle Department of Transportation recently framed the intent of Vision Zero at a public meeting this way: “How many deaths or serious injuries would be an acceptable number in your family? Or to your friends?” (Schellenberg 2015). Among the

audience, there was brief silence and then collective nodding and murmuring that no one would want any traffic deaths or serious injuries to occur in their family or to their friends. This reveals that, while motor vehicles kill 40,000 people per year in the United States (Vanderbilt 2008, p. 271), we seem comfortable with these fatalities so long as our families or we have not directly suffered death or serious injury as a consequence. It appears that people are able to rationalize away these kinds of deaths because they are seen as unintentional killings and because most of us necessarily participate in and reap mobility benefits from the automobile-centric system that produces these risks.

Driving is not only a risk to the safety of those walking, biking, etc., but it is damaging to the driver themselves. Driving encourages aggression and isolates the individual (Vanderbilt 2008). Especially when speaking of a single-occupant vehicle, the driver is under less social accountability and drives more aggressively, as measured by speed and following distance, than if they had the relational pressures of another passenger within the vehicle or of direct interaction with strangers outside on the street (Vanderbilt 2008, p. 25). Anonymity encourages aggression and removes inhibition (p. 26). When walking, the people that we encounter may be strangers to us, but then we are physically present in space with them, not physically separated by metal, glass, or following distance. Whether it is aggressive driving or the harshness found in many anonymous online forums, when we feel that no one can easily identify us or that they are unlikely to confront our actions, “there is little incentive to engage in normal social pleasantries” (Vanderbilt 2008, p. 27).

Much of our frustration while driving comes from a lack of ability to adequately communicate your intent to others, and it is also much more difficult to express your identity when driving. Our identities become expressed and standardized based on the model of car, a type of license plate, or a bumper sticker (Vanderbilt 2008, p. 24). While

it is true that someone can make an assumption or generalization about another person walking past them on the street based on a limited number of signifying physical factors, the pace and shared physical presence of walking reduces isolation compared to the nature of driving that would cause us to react quickly or harshly to a certain type of vehicle or driver cutting us off in traffic.

Driving gives us a sense of security and comfortable separation from those around us, while dismantling our ability or even desire to communicate with people outside of our vehicles. Social geographer David Mitchell describes this phenomenon:

...but a central factor [in the rise of the sport utility vehicle] has been the sense of inviolability that a couple tons of steel and fiberglass can instill. Cocooned in a sealed chamber, behind tinted glass, with the temperature fully controlled, and the GPS system tracking, and sometimes dictating, our every turn, our every stop and start, we are radically isolated from each other, able to communicate only through the false connectedness of the cell phone. We ride high and sovereign; we are masters of space; we are safe against all who might intrude, all who might stand in our way (and against the weather, too). That this is a false security has been amply shown in traffic accident statistics... (Mitchell 2005, p. 96)

This state of isolation from others creates what Mitchell calls:

...a dual empty volume: the empty volume immediately surrounding the individual and defined either by law or a couple tons of steel; and the empty volume that this law- and steel-encased individual now can travel through, a space made empty on the one hand by the scurrying, fleeing dance of those who might see a need to impede your progress (to make a political point or to ask for a handout) but who now can't, and on the other by those who have simply been barred altogether from being in the space (in the name of your comfort, your safety). (Mitchell 2005, p. 97)

Henri Lefebvre also laments the place the car has taken up in cities: "The street is more than just a place for movement and circulation. The invasion of the automobile and the pressure of the automobile lobby have turned the car into a key object, parking into an obsession, traffic into a priority, harmful to urban and social life" (Lefebvre 2003).

Along with the behavioral effects of being in a car, there are serious ramifications incurred by the engineering of streets and roadways and the norms that the engineering implies. These will encourage certain types of behavior by both people driving and people walking. For instance, the longer the wait or more circuitous the route, the more likely it will be that pedestrians will jaywalk or dash across the road against the signal (Vanderbilt 2008, p. 225). For drivers, the traffic signals, lanes markings, signage, seat belts, air bags and other features of roadway engineering or vehicle design promote a sense of safety or ease and often allow people driving to pay less attention and travel more quickly. Counter-intuitively, it appears that “increased feelings of safety can push us to take more risks, while feeling less safe makes us more cautious” (Vanderbilt 2008, p. 266). A built environment that is over-engineered for one mode of travel will naturally be biased toward the safety of those users.

In addressing this phenomenon, Vanderbilt summarizes the work of Sam Peltzman, an economist who questioned the actual benefit of vehicle safety devices, “Drivers...were trading a decrease in accident risk with an increase in ‘driving intensity’. Even if the occupants of cars themselves were safer, the increase in car safety had been ‘offset’ by an increase in the fatality rate of people who did not benefit from the safety features – pedestrians, bicyclists, and motorcyclist. As drivers felt safer, everyone else had reason to feel less safe” (p. 264). As is the aim of programs like Vision Zero, planning and engineering for the safety of the most vulnerable users (in particular, people walking) does not decrease or preclude the safety of less vulnerable users (those driving). However, a system that prioritizes the safety of those driving does decrease the safety of those walking.

Along with safety issues, driving has created various environmental, economic, and ethical concerns. For instance, because cars are largely run on fossil fuels, their

impact on the environment through carbon and particulate emissions and the economic dependence and cost of these globally divisive and finite resources are well known. However, the solutions offered to this impact can be seen as two-fold. On one hand, the development of cleaner fuels and more fuel-efficient vehicles reduces the need for non-renewable sources; on the other hand, reducing the need to drive, by encouraging co-located, walkable land uses, will reduce demand for automobility. While I am not arguing that alternative fuels should not be developed, it is important to recognize that a readily available source of fuel (clean or otherwise) neither encourages people to drive less nor addresses the social impact of automobile use on interactions in urban environments.

An automobile-centric city creates ethical concerns surrounding the treatment of various people groups, including the young, the elderly, and those in underprivileged communities. Whether it is the busy mother taking her children to school (Moran 2005, p. 68) or the case of someone who cannot afford to live in a highly walkable, dense urban environment, hindrances to car ownership/use and the dividing and isolating effects of automobile infrastructure greatly affect marginalized communities. Urban scholars have well studied the construction of urban freeways which divided historic minority and poor communities in the United States. Not only were these freeways sited through neighborhoods that tended to have the least political power, but, even in the face of great local opposition, they were built by government officials or politicians who believed that urban freeways were the right tool to keep cities prosperous in the twentieth century and beyond. The Cross-Bronx Expressway, completed in the early 1960s by New York official, Robert Moses, displaced 60,000 people from their homes and “made the Bronx, above all, a place to get out of” (Moran 2005, p. 64). These kinds of urban freeways are not unique to the United States. In the

1960s in London, the Westway, which was built as an early piece of a large roadways plan for the city, was met with great local protest, led to an anti-roads campaign in Britain, and ultimately led to the extensive motorway plans for inner-London being scrapped (Moran 2005, p. 65).

Safety, the health of the natural environment, and a multitude of issues surrounding automobile use will continue to be components of the work planners and engineers do into the foreseeable future. However, we must purposefully address the social costs that are embedded in our current understanding of automobility and further develop our understanding of the social benefits of walking. In the remaining sections, I will explore how our current social narrative specifically frames pedestrians and their use of the street, how walking can promote a more human-centered, social understanding of ourselves and those around us, and how that changed understanding can transform how we perceive and build our cities.

III. Pathologizing and Excluding the Pedestrian



(Mielczarek 2015)

The Transgression of Walking

Walking has become viewed as a transgressive act in many public spaces and streets in the United States and abroad. In America, in addition to a hostile built environment for pedestrians, we have constructed social norms and established a code of law, in most places, that stigmatizes and penalizes the very act of walking. The concept of jaywalking, for instance, at its core places the automobile user before the pedestrian by asserting that the person walking is infringing on the right-of-way dedicated to the movement of the person driving a car. This is a clear segmentation of space which communicates that a person is not welcome or safe in that public space, the roadway, unless they are occupying a vehicle. The roadway forbids people to inhabit it simply as their embodied selves. We have developed this normative environment that disallows people from using their bodies even for the seemingly normal act of walking, and we must more closely interrogate how this affects our ability as individuals and as a society to connect and build identity. This chapter seeks to incorporate social-spatial

theories and examples of how this embodied experience of walking can be understood and contextualized with relation to the built environment, laws and statutes, and social constructions of street use.

The Pedestrian and the Street

In his article “The Transgressive Geographies of Daily Life”, Alastair Bonnett presents the concept of a “socialist imagination” through which transgressive acts of daily life serve as a vehicle for exploring and questioning the conventions of the everyday urban environment. He uses the roadrunner (or this could alternatively be viewed as the jaywalker), a person who dashes across streets or intersections at locations not intended by traffic engineers or officials, as a typical example of the transgressive act:

The roadrunners find themselves in a dangerous and car dominated environment, an environment structured for the benefit of capital. Their resistance to this process represents a practical critique and refusal of the alienating rationality of contemporary planning. Their physical movement across the roundabout articulates the need of people to have environments that are created with the needs of human sociality, rather than profit and exclusivity, in mind. (Bonnett 1996, p. 33)

These kinds of automobile-centric roadways serve current, neoliberal structures by facilitating a high-volume, fast flow of consumers to, from, and by locations of consumption (i.e. strip shopping centers). There is not much concern given in this existing system as to whether the user socializes, contemplates, or otherwise personally gains from the travel experience.

Revisiting Carmona’s critique of contemporary public space, he refers to the type of space which he calls “invaded space”: these are urban spaces that have been built or transformed over time into wide roadways or parking lots for the private car (2010, p. 127). In these spaces, movement and the act of travel has lost its social aspect and is

simply about the movement from Point A to B. Carmona highlights that, in many cases, the space allotted for vehicle lanes is much greater than that for sidewalks, even if the number of pedestrians is much higher than the number of motorists. This idea of “invaded space” also implies that streets did not always belong to the automobile, that it, in fact, usurped the position of a previous user, the pedestrian. The nature of this “invasion” can help us understand who and how one claims the space of the street and how different powers and decisions ultimately decide the use which invades and the use which is rejected.

The Pejorative Pedestrian

Under the normative American perspective, people who walk are considered to be nuisances or potential impediments in the path of a person driving a motor vehicle; the idea of “pedestrian” can even be used as a generally pejorative term and to make assumptions about status or social hierarchy. In an article defending jaywalking, Tom Vanderbilt points out the clear value judgments that many traffic engineers make regarding roadway users, “Note this comment in a Federal Highway Administration report: ‘Still, almost no one can avoid occasional pedestrian status,’ as if they were discussing exposure to a venereal disease” (Vanderbilt 2009). Being a pedestrian, being someone who must rely on their own two legs to move about the larger environment, is viewed with disdain and as if it is unfortunate that we are, on occasion, afflicted with this state while not in our vehicles. In another article, similarly addressing the state of walking in America, Vanderbilt highlights that even the term “pedestrian” itself has pejorative and diminutive roots. It’s Greek root meant “prosaic, plain, commonplace, uninspired”, and the Latin *pedester* was often used to distinguish between those privileged to ride on horseback versus those who remained on foot (Vanderbilt 2012: 1).

A common theme arises: that the idea of “pedestrian” only exists when placed in the context of other people who are using a means of travel other than their feet to travel. In our society, the term “pedestrian” is even used to refer to a person or action that is lowly, base, or uneducated. It is difficult to escape the psychological framework we have built for ourselves in which we see a pedestrian or a jaywalker as a fool or jester, someone who is not informed or is not privileged to understand the status that riding horseback or driving a vehicle affords the individual. This can also have a particularly negative impact on how people who cannot afford to own a car are viewed, lending to car use being seen as an expression of status and social position. This negative view of people who walk has existed for many decades in American culture, as exemplified by illustrations below from the early twentieth century to recent years.

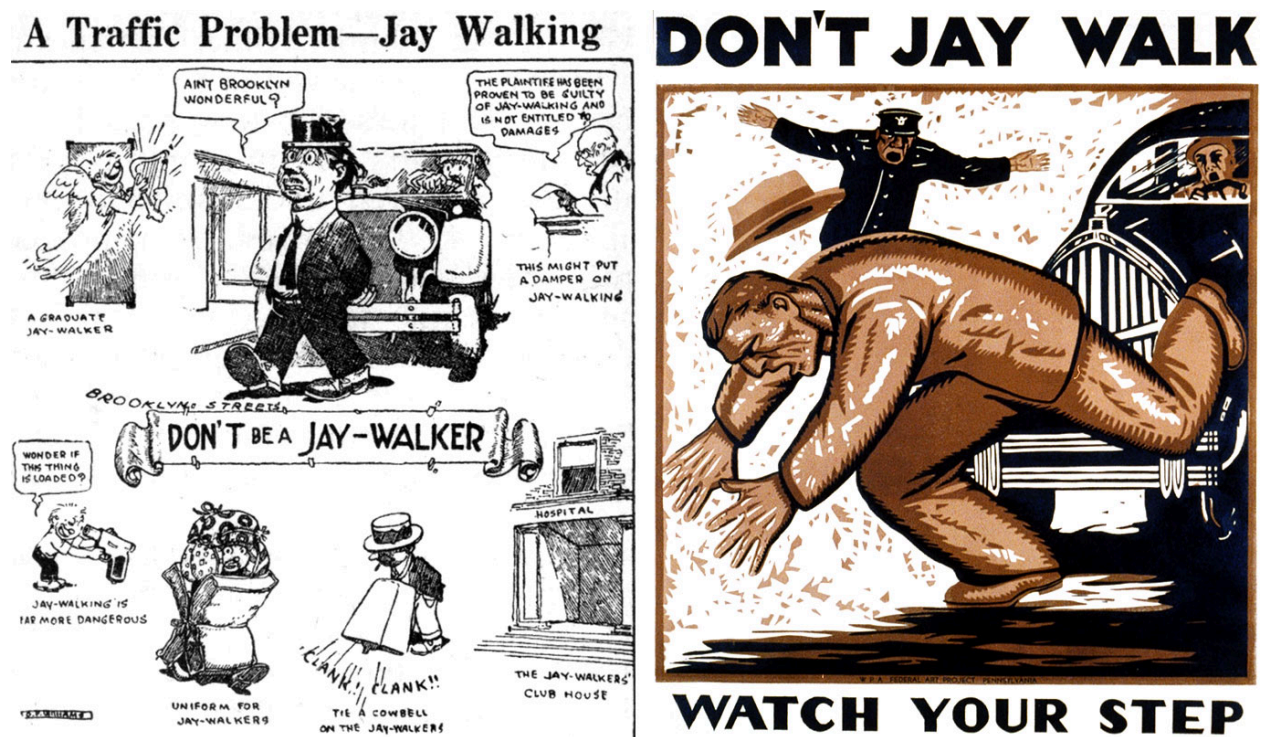


Figure 1: Left, a cartoon from 1923 that mocks jaywalking behavior (from The National Safety Council); Right, a 1937 WPA poster which emphasizes jaywalking dangers Source for both: (Oatman-Stanford 2014)



Figure 2: An advertisement campaign from the Washington DC region, focusing blame on the pedestrian as the greater threat to road safety (Lewis 2011)

Arising from this paradigm that walking is foolish or unsafe, and that driving is a commonplace right of street usage, come strong reactions when this “foolish” transgression is committed and when the order of the commonly accepted belief is disrupted. As an example of a transgressive violation, Tim Cresswell offers, “In the street, each individual is supposed not to attack those he meets; anyone who transgresses this law is deemed guilty of a criminal act” (Cresswell 1996, p. 27). There are expectations of what is appropriate and inappropriate behavior in the street. However, walking, a seemingly far less innocuous action than a direct physical attack, has somehow become a part of the inappropriate, a part of the actions which categorize an individual as guilty of violating the expected order of the street.

Cresswell emphasizes that we exist in a “normative landscape” which informs our sense of what is right and “common sense” through the signals and messages presented through spaces (p. 8). Transgression occurs when a usage of space goes against what is viewed as “normal”; in the issue at hand, this could be someone walking in the street where common sense would otherwise dictate the space as one for driving through.

Cresswell continues, “But place reproduces the beliefs that produce it in a way

that makes them appear natural, self-evident, and commonsense. We are silent in a library because we believe that it is appropriate to be silent in libraries, and by being silent in libraries we contribute to the continuation of silence” (p. 16). At one point in history, we walked in the street because we believed that was what a street was intended for. It was a place of mixing with other folks and negotiating trolleys, horses, and venders with carts; no one moved at high speed. It was assumed that walking was simply the nature of space. However, nowadays, we drive in the street because driving was promoted, adopted, and became the normative function of the street. No matter how ingrained or absolute the automobile-centric street may seem, it is not, by any means, a cosmically prescribed order that has existed for all of history. It is, however, a production of human shifts in transportation technology in the developed world that has encouraged us to try to reconcile the capacity of the automobile for high speeds with the dense and connected nature of human settlement. This has led to a highly rationalized, “engineered”, yet fast, street, defined by a multitude of lines, signs, and underlying state and municipal laws that attempt, above all things, to prescribe predictability, order, and, in theory, safety.

However, while banning cars from cities could serve as one solution, streets can exist as shared spaces where the physical demarcation of space with curbs or other markings is reduced (i.e. the Dutch woonerf) and the potential for interactions and encounters is prioritized (Toth 2015). Gary Toth with the Project for Public Spaces points out: “Shared space is not a transportation concept, it is a political concept and placemaking is the process to accomplish it politically” (2015). The issue of whom and how one uses the street is not simply an engineering question but rather an intense cultural, ethical, and institutional battle.

Visionaries like Jane Jacobs and Baron Haussmann understood the power of the

street (albeit for radically different purposes). They recognized the key roles that streets play in the life of cities. As such, we as a society and as individuals must claim the power that the street provides to its users and influence how the street is used. Streets and public rights-of-way were not always given over to the car. We can choose to return greater portions of that space back to pedestrians, so that we can renew the embodied, human, social interaction critical to the life of cities.

Legal and Institutional Structures

As evident in the contentious nature of contemporary debates in transportation policy and street uses, there are often competing motivations for creating laws or policies that prioritize or diminish pedestrians or drivers. As touched on early, safety is often used as the base cause for any sort of law governing the management of roadway and public right-of-way, but it appears that often the safety of the pedestrian, the more vulnerable user, is secondary to the “safety”, convenience, and uninterrupted flow of the motorist.

This is exemplified in the case of a Georgia mother, Rachel Nelson, who was charged and convicted of vehicular manslaughter when she was crossing a suburban roadway with her four children. A driver, who had a poor driving record and was under the influence of alcohol and painkillers at the time, struck her and her children, killing her 4-year-old son (Vanderbilt 2012: 2). Nelson and her children had just alighted the bus at a stop which sits across a wide, high-speed roadway from the apartment where she lived. Legally, she was expected to walk one-third of a mile to the nearest signalized crossing and backtrack another one-third of a mile on the other side of the roadway (with narrow sidewalks) back to her home. Instead she decided to cross the road, at a place with no crosswalk but that was the most direct line to cross from the bus

stop. Nelson was considered at fault because of her choice to cross where the right-of-way was not hers, and ultimately she suffered the blame for her “foolish” behavior, having claimed the use of a space that was never intended for her or anyone walking in the first place. In another instance, a mother in Utah was charged with child neglect for allowing her child to walk to school, because they lived in a neighborhood without sidewalks (Vanderbilt 2012: 2). We have built a world in which parents are considered “foolish” for even allowing their children to practice their embodied ability to walk.

Considering these examples of how anti-pedestrian laws have directly impacted peoples’ lives, it is important to recognize how the letter of the law itself is worded. Let us use the City of Seattle, arguably a city which is more conscious about pedestrian infrastructure than many places in the United States, as a case example. One subsection of the Seattle Pedestrian Law states: “Yield right of way. Every pedestrian crossing a roadway at any point other than in a marked crosswalk or within an unmarked crosswalk at an intersection shall yield the right of way to all vehicles upon the roadway” (“Pedestrian Program” 2015). While this sort of approach is commonplace and is second nature to most people walking, it limits the movement of a pedestrian to a defined space, often a minority of the right-of-way, while the automobile is permitted full access to the majority of the street. Granted, it seems logical to encourage pedestrians to not imperil themselves by stepping out in front of a moving vehicle. However, a base assumption must be addressed: why should the ability of automobiles to travel at high speeds be considered a priority in the first place, with the position of the pedestrian being addressed after this assumed fact? While Seattle does a better job than many cities in prioritizing pedestrians in elements of its municipal code (it is, in fact, ranked as a Platinum “Walk Friendly Community” (“Walk Friendly Communities” 2015)), there is still an underlying understanding that pedestrians use crosswalks

(marked or unmarked) and certain highly defined spaces (i.e. the sidewalk), so as not to infringe on the ability of others to operate motor vehicles in the roadway.

Other Seattle statutes include:

- No person upon roller skates, or riding in or by means of any coaster, skateboard, toy vehicle or similar device, shall go upon the roadway of any arterial street or transit coach route, except while crossing such street at a crosswalk; or engage in any sport, amusement or exercise or play in the roadway of any street. ("Pedestrian Program" 2015)
- The City Council may by ordinance designate streets upon which pedestrians will be granted right-of-way over vehicles using that street. ("Pedestrian Program" 2015)

A 2010 article on Seattle Police stops for jaywalking highlights the inherent tension that arises when people are confronted for performing an action that is so intuitively understood to be a part of human existence, namely walking (KING 2010). Two teens shoved a police officer and were punched in return by the officer when they were stopped for jaywalking. A study conducted for the Seattle Police Department found that jaywalking stops often provoke stronger reactions than other types of crime and can escalate beyond the relative severity of the infraction (KING 2010). It is likely that, because walking is such a primary human function, we respond strongly when we are prevented from doing it or when walking is used as an excuse to single out people for harassment, when, in reality, there are other underlying motivations at work (i.e. racism, profiling, etc.). Many rules have been placed on how we can and cannot perform certain basic human actions, and often it is when we are confronted by these constructed rules that we quickly, and sometimes harshly, respond from a basic, internal sense that something doesn't seem right about being restricted from performing that action that your body is naturally structured to do. There have also been those who question the stated motivation of public safety as the reason for these

stops. Instead they are seen by some as simply a strategy to create revenue, while there are other criminal issues that Seattle faces which many view as more important (KING 2010).

Seattle is not unique in its prioritization of the automobile in the street, and, in fact, it is much friendlier for people walking than many, more suburban, communities that do not have the benefit of a historically connected grid and relatively higher densities. Cities, from the more urban to the more suburban, must seriously value the embodied and social nature of walking, a perspective which is not currently well reflected in pedestrian laws or attitudes about what people do in the public right-of-way.

Ultimately, when considering the urban environment, I wish to draw attention not simply to the paradigm of automobile primacy in the street in much of public space, but also that this allocation of space is not value-neutral. It marginalizes the pedestrian; it demeans the very human act of walking; and it has built itself into a reaffirming system that makes the mere questioning of it seem idiotic, illogical, and not in keeping with the “common sense” order of our streets as they exist today. Understanding that, for many years, the automobile has dominated as the central function of the street, it will take many years more to shift our understanding of the purpose of the street yet again. This is not to say that the pendulum will swing back to the pedestrian as the sole mode and spell the death of the automobile but to instead argue that a renewed pedestrian perspective must be taken for the street. There must be a shifted hierarchy of the street that returns walking to a place of spatial ownership, engendering stronger social understanding, connections, and human agency than that which is seen in our current streets. The automobile, bicyclist, transit, and other means of moving through the street will not be entirely excluded but will, rather, insert themselves with the

pedestrian into a more conscious negotiation of the street right-of-way and lead to a fabric of liminal spaces that can facilitate social exchange and a greater variety of human movement. Ultimately, we must choose walking and human interaction over fast automobile travel.

IV. Philosophies of Walking

Walking builds understanding of oneself, of others, and of the encompassing environment. Walking constructs; walking adds; walking allows you to take in bits of information and interactions from the environment around you and compose a more complete picture of what the world is, what the world contains, and what your place is within the context of that world.

As seen through the writings of Frederic Gros, in *A Philosophy of Walking*, walking, as one pursuit, can be an individualized experience of self-actualization in which encounters with other people are seen as secondary or simply complimentary to the primary course of an individual's personal journey (2014). Gros speaks of the encounters of the flâneur in the urban streets as one who idles and observes. He also offers concepts of walking as pilgrimage, as a daily routine, as contemplation, as regeneration, and even as a state of well-being, in so demonstrating that walking serves a multiplicity of purposes in how human beings process and engage the world around them (Gros 2014).

In one philosophy of walking, Gros describes the walks of Jean-Jacques Rousseau in which he tried to remove himself from the pretense and portent of the bourgeois French society in which he found himself (2014). Rousseau had become frustrated by what he saw as human society being an egotistical shell of what the basic and full understanding of humanness should be (Gros 2014). Gros highlights Rousseau's distinction between egotism and self-love, "So the natural man instinctively *loves himself*, but never favours himself. Only in society do you learn to do that. And you have to walk a long way to relearn self-love" (Gros 2014, p. 75). "For, once you no longer expect anything from the world on these aimless and peaceful walks, that is

when the world delivers itself to you, gives itself, yields itself up. When you no longer expect anything. All is then bestowed as a supplement, a gratuitous favour of presence, of being there” (Gros 2014, p. 79).

Embodied Experience and Meaning in Walking

Rousseau, Thoreau, and others saw walking as a powerful means of understanding and building oneself as they understood and encountered nature (Gross 2014). While most urban planners are not concerned with a long walk through the forest or through a bucolic field, the same principal of reflexive environmental and personal reflection holds true in the city. Rousseau and Thoreau built a deeper understanding of themselves by walking. They did not walk in a vacuum or consider themselves detached from the environment around them when walking. Rather, it was that intimate connection and exposure to elements of the physical world at the pace of walking that built layers of understanding of what the world was and what their place in the world was as reflected against nature.

Thoreau viewed the importance of walking as a means of understanding Nature (which is not to be discounted when considering the Urban). He believed walking to be a character of basic humanness, something that cannot be bought or produced, and foresaw the forces at work that were conspiring to dissuade Americans from walking.

At present, in this vicinity, the best part of the land is not private property; the landscape is not owned, and the walker enjoys comparative freedom. But possibly the day will come when it will be partitioned off into so-called pleasure-grounds, in which a few will take a narrow and exclusive pleasure only—when fences shall be multiplied, and man-traps and other engines invented to confine men to the public road, and walking over the surface of God's earth shall be construed to mean trespassing on some gentleman's grounds. To enjoy a thing exclusively is commonly to exclude yourself from the true enjoyment of it. Let us improve our opportunities, then, before the evil days come. (Thoreau 1862)

Sadly, in Thoreau's mind, we now live in those evil days, a period in American history in which natural land has been consumed by suburban development and in which automobiles isolate and confine our ability to experience the world around us. Walking through both the natural and the urban has become removed from the daily life of most people in our country. Thoreau lamented that we were cultivating, educating, and rejecting the wildness from society by disengaging from Nature and becoming more confined and stationary in daily life, not walking or exploring beyond the defined bounds of office, home, and immediate, known environments (Thoreau 1862). In a similar way, Sandercock and Mitchell have shown that we have removed the wildness of desire and encounter with our public streets and spaces and have created buffers and bubbles of land and vehicles that allow for a sanitized, protected, and numbed existence in our modern built environments (Sandercock 2003, Mitchell 2005). Thoreau's concern about humankind's detachment from Nature is analogous to our contemporary concern about humankind's detachment from each other in urban society. One means of combating both is walking.

- Living, in the deepest sense, is something no one else can do for us. You can be replaced at work, but not for walking. That's the great difference. (Gros 2014, p. 90)
- ...Walking gives you *participation*: feeling the vegetable, mineral and animal aspects in yourself. I feel made from the same wood as the tree whose bark I touch in passing, the same tissue as the tall grasses I brush against, and my heavy breathing, when I stop, matches the panting of the hare that stops suddenly before me. (p. 96)

From the introspective nature walks of Thoreau and Rousseau, to the busy and complex maneuvering through the streets of an urban environment, walking establishes a connection between an individual's identity, the bodily act of walking, and the character of the places and people that are encountered in both the most tranquil and

the most active of environments. In human psychology, there is a link between the movement of the body and one's ability to process information and form thoughts (Jabr 2014). Furthermore, walking in particular allows us to better connect our internal senses with external stimuli than is possible when traveling at a higher speed (Jabr 2014).

Walking at our own pace creates an unadulterated feedback loop between the rhythm of our bodies and our mental state that we cannot experience as easily when we're jogging at the gym, steering a car, biking, or during any other kind of locomotion. When we stroll, the pace of our feet naturally vacillates with our moods and the cadence of our inner speech... (Jabr 2014).

There is a discernable, albeit not always quantifiable, connection between the human body, our actions, and the way in which we perceive the urban (or non-urban) environment. Jabr argues that walking is the key mode by which we understand the urban environment, and Middleton argues that we have a great lack in understanding how people truly experience the nuances of spaces and places while walking (Jabr 2014, Middleton 2010). Assuming these assertions are true, then we currently exist in an environment where our primary mode of transportation (the automobile) is impeding us from not only understanding more about ourselves and our personal experiences of meaning but also from understanding deeper and more diverse meanings of the urban environment and each other.

The best urban environments are those that allow for the proliferation of complexity, connection, and understanding of others and of ourselves, but we must have a means (a mode) by which to engage in that diversity of experiences. Even people who take a more economic or rationalist perspective often agree that a more diversified economy is stronger and more resilient. Unfortunately, however, that seems, in some ways, to be where their perspective on diversity and complexity ends. Instead, the rationalist conversation often centers on notions of efficiency, flow of goods and people, and streamlined processes. This then has invaded our streets; they are no longer the

spaces intended for the theatre of a diverse complexity of interactions and exchanges (Jacobs 1961). Rather, streets are rationalized into zones for throughput, funneling the user to the next destination or task. Life would not conceivably take place in the street. The notion of the street as a place of pedestrian complexity and encounters is considered illogical and, in fact, subversive to the intent of the rational mind to optimize travel through the urban (or suburban) environment. “An established order, if it is successful, must make its world seem to be the natural world – the commonsense world” (Cresswell 1996, p. 19), and in our world the automobile is the commonsense.

While neither the urban realm nor nature completely defines a person’s meaning, they contextualize the individual’s relative location to social and environmental forces beyond themselves. You cannot know what your face looks like without a mirror. In the same way, you can more clearly see yourself and your assumptions about the world if you are able to experience it at a pace and with an intimate closeness that reflects the reality of what is there. If you zoom by at 60 or even 20 mph, you cannot pause, reflect, or connect with the people and environment around you. It was Rousseau’s and Thoreau’s opportunity to process nature at both its immensity and its detailed complexity that gave them a deeper appreciation for what exactly it was they were seeing.

Walking helps us encounter both the social and physical interstitial spaces in the city. When we move too fast, when we skip over the in-between spaces and the in-between people, we build a conceptualization of the world in which we think our experiences at Point A and at Point B form the whole, while leaving out everything in-between. In addition, most of today’s suburbs have reserved many of their interstitial spaces for the storage and movement of the car, leaving fewer spaces for human encounter. If we walk, we have to see the in-between. Even if we each process the “in-

between” differently, we have encountered it, and it becomes harder to ignore. If we walk and encounter a homeless person, it is harder to ignore and brush off the social inequity than if we drive by a homeless person at 60 mph. In urban planning, we influence the construction of the interstitial spaces. We influence the roads, the alleys, the parks, and the varied land uses that wedge themselves into the gaps between the primary spaces of someone’s life.

Walking allows you to participate in the environment around you in a way that no other mode of transportation does. In the urban planning profession, many value participatory planning, so that citizens can be directly involved in the planning process and in the formation of plans. Underlying this is the idea that people should be participating and meaningfully inhabiting the places they live. However, participation should not only be in the political planning processes or the occasional public meeting. Instead, we should actively and daily participate and experience the environment of the places that are then influenced by the planning process. It is difficult for people to participate in processes that could change or alter a place if they have not first participated in and encountered the nature of that place. In the same way Thoreau participated and learned in Nature through walking, we participate and reveal aspects of ourselves in the urban environment through walking. I feel that I am made from the same flesh as the person I bump into on the street; I know that my voice echoes in the same way a clock bell does from the walls of a village square; I realize that my footsteps reverberate off the concrete sidewalk as does a jackhammer. The forces of the urban environment resonate to my core.

Walking, as they say, ‘empties the mind’. In another way, walking *fills* the mind with a different sense of purpose. Not connected with ideas or doctrines, not in the sense of a head full of phrases, quotations, theories: but full of the world’s presence. That presence which, during the walk, in successive strata, has been deposited in the soul throughout the day. (Gros 2014, p. 97)

De Certeau, in *The Practice of Everyday Life*, presents “a rhetoric of walking”, the idea of walking as analogous to speech, with different languages and modalities of walking (1984). With this, I would posit that using a wheelchair or other type of mobility device could also be considered a language or dialect of walking, another way to experience the street, rather than being seen as an excluded or separated act from the performance of walking. When considering the meaning that we find through walking, it is important to highlight that environments that are walkable can and should also be accessible to people with disabilities and those who use mobility devices.

Fundamentally, walkability is not simply a question of a person’s ability to access the world around them by walking but can be, more importantly, an expression of one’s individual agency. This agency, in an ideal sense, is a lived-out assertion of a person to contribute to and learn from the world in a full, contextualized, and meaningful way that comes from their uniqueness as an individual within the whole of society.

Importantly, a person’s understanding of themselves should be framed in their relation to other people and to the context of the community and environment around them and not only a pursuit of individualized, (potentially detached) self-actualization.

Walkability as Public Good

I would like to borrow an argument posed by Margaret Kohn in her book *Brave New Neighborhoods*. As she critiques recent trends of the privatization of public space, she presents economic, justice, and political rationales for the provision of public goods and, more specifically, of public space. Kohn recognizes that public goods, such as roads or national defense are often provided by the public sector because there is no economic incentive for private businesses to provide them (Kohn 2004, p. 195). She also presents arguments that public goods and spaces should exist for a broader fulfillment

of what is just or right and also for political purposes, such as encouraging the poor toward a higher moral or productive societal state (p. 200). However, Kohn, ultimately argues that these rationales fall short and idealize the merits and ability of public goods and spaces to affect people's behavior and beliefs. As an alternative approach, she believes that the primary purpose for providing public space is to allow for potential encounters that will influence the way we identify ourselves and identify others (Kohn 2004, p. 201).

...Exposure to suffering does not necessarily evoke a feeling of sympathy. But it does open up the *possibility* of expanding the circle of people with whom we sympathize. There is no guarantee that enlarging public space will lead to an enlargement of social imagination but the alternative is to live in a world of private spaces where the proprietor has already sent the street people away. (Kohn 2003).

Similarly to Rousseau's concepts of self love and pity, there is an importance to learning more about oneself and about others, with the personal understanding of oneself coming in part from a reflected understanding that comes from the people and places we encounter. Therefore, if all spaces are private and all people removed from the street and from each other, there is a deterioration of the potential for the pity or sympathy that both Kohn and Rousseau characterize as an important part of what it means to be human.

Kohn's rationale for public space as public good, the need to sympathize with others, to see and be seen, and to recognize and internalize the struggle and existence of others, can also be seen as an argument for walking and walkable communities. More specifically, the encounters in public space that Kohn emphasizes are only possible if one is bodily present in that space: conversing, sitting, observing, standing, *walking* through that space. While not the only way, walking is a critical means of encountering the environment around us and, more importantly, the people around us. If we do not

encounter the struggles of others, we run the risk of stunting our understanding of people and ourselves. We would otherwise be isolated in our private residences, our private cars, or passing by the world at a speed too quickly on a bike or a bus. While all of these spaces or modes do have some level of potential for encounter with others, removing walking from the body of experiences that informs us is troubling. We either choose to marginalize and reject people from our view or allow ourselves to build understanding through walking and encountering. Again, as Kohn argues, nothing can force us to sympathize with those who we encounter while walking or while inhabiting public space, but the alternative, private isolation in cars and in a built environment molded by the car, removes *any and all* possibility to build that sympathy for those who are different from ourselves.

V. Inhabiting and Socializing the City

Urban Social Benefits of Walking

Urban access, because it enhances physical proximity among people from all social walks of life, is an important catalytic element in a globalized world. Diverse populations living within the confines of urbanized regions develop modes of social interaction and tolerance across divisions of race, ethnicity, class gender and age. This diversity in turn is the source of the continual innovation that we associate with urban life (Sclar 2014, p. 13).

In producing the greater social interaction that an accessible city provides, walking acts as a catalyst to foster an actively inhabiting population. Beyond the encounters in the act of walking itself, it provides access to the spaces and people that are a part of the urban realm. Suburban environments are inhabited by people, but it is a passive habitation with regards to human interaction. Places that have given themselves over primarily to the automobile have lost much of the social character that makes strong urban places.

In his documentary, *The Social Life of Small Urban Spaces*, William Whyte concludes of urban spaces and the people in them: “A street is the river of life of a city. They come to these places not to escape but to partake of it” (1988). However, as is too often true in present-day urban and suburban environments, streets seem to act instead as moats to be navigated across, not rivers to flow through. Not only is this by design, but also from a culture which denies the walker from entering the river of the street. Rather, we are relegated to its banks, if that.

Whyte also affirms that “The street itself is the number one area for recreation”, referencing activity on 101st Street in New York City (1988). While Whyte primarily focuses on public plazas in his film, he makes the point to bring the viewer back to the street at the culmination of his story. His primary objective was to evaluate the vibrancy and characteristics of plazas for the New York City Planning Commission, but Whyte

uses the street, particularly when it is inhabited with pedestrians and children playing in the middle of the street, as an object lesson of what a vibrant space looks like and how it can inform the character of plazas, which are also critical spaces of social interaction and habitation in cities. Plazas are spaces to sit, to meet, to gather, and even to protest. Plazas usually do not serve a defined transportation function, unlike streets, but both plazas and streets act as places of encounter and of social discourse, for both the mundane and the radical. Unfortunately it appears, in many cities, that we are missing the quintessential characteristics of the street (and plaza) which Whyte saw as so emblematic of the strong social interactions and activities he sought to highlight in urban life. It is this social urban life that is the key reason why automobiles can no longer be prioritized over walking in the urban environment. Instead we must reorganize our streets to favor walking, even sometimes exclusively.

In moving toward this reprioritization of our streets, it is valuable to consider some current approaches that return greater ownership of the street to walking. La Rambla in Barcelona, Spain and New Road in Brighton, UK (images below), are two examples of streets that prioritize people walking over other users in the street. La Rambla has a wide central promenade, which is reserved for people walking (along with other uses, such as small vendors or seating), while narrow, single-lane rights-of-way, along the outer edges next to the buildings, serve as calm access points for automobiles (there are also small sidewalks between the car lanes and the buildings).

New Road is an example of a shared space street (sometimes termed “woonerf” if it is a residential street, see Gary Toth). These shared streets minimize traffic signage, remove most pavement markings, and eliminate the curbs, turning the street into a continuous surface (Toth 2015). Unlike a pedestrianized street, shared spaces allow pedestrians, cyclists, and automobiles to maneuver the street together. However, the

design of the street still prioritizes people walking, sitting, or otherwise wandering about and inhabiting the space. People driving are permitted, but at slow speeds, and they are more cautious because of the removal of the highly delineated hierarchy typical of most streets (Toth 2015). I would argue that streets like La Rambla and New Road are the kinds of streets that we need to move toward, as we seek to create cities that better foster meaningful, inhabited urban living. These streets also begin to blur the line between the plaza and the street, both of which Whyte saw as spaces of meaningful human connection and interaction.



Figure 3: La Rambla, a largely pedestrianized street in Barcelona, Spain (“La Rambla” 2012)



Figure 4: New Road, a shared space street in Brighton, UK (“New Road” 2011)

The City of Desire

As urban planners, we generally do not focus on understanding the internal nature and lived experience of individuals; that we leave to the fields of psychology or sociology. We seem to convince ourselves that the issues we seek to address in society are too great, too complex, and too high-level to try to process the personal, emotionally varied ways in which people approach other people and places. Instead, planners usually standardize, aggregate, and generalize in order to provide quantifiably defensible rationale for policy decisions. However, it is in the wrestling and struggling with the messiness of people and places that we find what we love about cities. They are places where we encounter the dynamic personal and collective expressions of

people and society more completely. Leonie Sandercock points out the disconnect between the rational planner and the diversity and desires of people,

One symptom of the narrowness of modernist planners' horizons is the fact that they find it very hard to focus on desires rather than needs. A need is supposedly an objectifiable entity, identified in 'needs surveys': 'I need a more frequent bus service'; 'I need more police patrols in my neighborhood'. A desire, by contrast, involves the subconscious, a personal engagement, dreams and feelings, an ability to intuit the atmosphere and feeling of a place. (Sandercock 2003, p. 404)

Sandercock argues that there must be spaces in the city that are spaces of desire, of encounter, of being together with strangers, and that these are, in fact, the foundation of city life (p. 403). The space of the city, in particular, allows for anonymity, but also an opportunity to be known, in which the desires of marginalized groups can be expressed, such as the historic experience of women and of gay men in large cities, as they were able to challenge and blur social norms in less controlled urban spaces (Chauncey 1994).

We see people who are not like us, who make us uncomfortable, who make us laugh, who make us reexamine our notions of who we are and our lens through which we view others. As urban planners, we have the ability to influence cities to be the places where that exposure happens. The street is a place where desire can be expressed, and, if urban planning is to encourage cities in which human beings are able to meet not only their needs but also their desires for contact and expression, then planners must think of the street as a place not just for fulfilling needs, movement, or services but also as a place of encounter and desire, namely played out through walking, the bodily inhabitation of the street, and the access we gain to a variety of public spaces of encounter.

Revisiting Vision Zero, it seems that this kind of traffic safety and planning effort, among others, is still based primarily on an objective, "needs" perspective (as

Sandercock would term it). I argue that it is important to expand the intent and purpose of Vision Zero (which is currently to make roads physically safer for all users and eliminate traffic fatalities) and similar efforts to include people's subjective, social experience in cities and in streets, specifically as experienced by walking. Along with the importance of objective needs such as safety from traffic injury and death, the ability of our street system to promote a diversity of experiences and desires in the city should be encouraged in planning practice. While it could seem that roadway safety and social understanding are unrelated issues (or that social understanding falls far below the priority of safety), they are both aspects of how the body exists in space. If physical safety and social interaction can be pursued together, then the totality of the embodied human experience in urban environments will be much improved.

The City of Pain

In his book, *Flesh and Stone*, Richard Sennett, an urban sociologist, explores the relationship between the human body and the urban environment in Western civilization. An underlying theme of Sennett's work is the nature of the city as a place where humans interact and that the diversity and multiplicity of actors and actions are, in fact, what actually create cities (1994). He begins with a quote from Aristotle in *The Politics*, "A city is composed of different kinds of men; similar people cannot bring a city into existence" (Sennett 1994, p. 13). Out of this belief on the nature of cities, Sennett laments how modern architecture and urban planning practice have led to a "sensory deprivation" in urban spaces, driven by a historical lack of dignity for the human body in Western civilization (Sennett 1994, p. 15). Among the themes that he explores, Sennett is interested in how human movement in cities is perceived, particularly since the advent of modern capitalism and individualism. The modern individual is a highly

mobile being. This mobility does have its benefits, as it is critical to the flow of labor and goods, and a mobile, circulating economy is more profitable than one in which the actors and goods of commerce are static (Sennett 1994, p. 256). However this mobility comes with a price: 1) the desensitization of the body to the spaces/ places through which we move, and 2) the proliferation of neutral spaces which serve only the value of rapid, individualized circulation (p. 256). "Moving around freely diminishes sensory awareness, arousal by places or people in those places" (p. 256). Again, this highlights the damage caused to the sociability and understanding of humans when driving or otherwise traveling at a speed that does not allow us to process the people and places around us. This is instead replaced with the experience of mobility itself. The much-maligned master builder of New York City, Robert Moses, was driven by the sense of pleasure he found in driving an automobile and, as such, created extensive, landscaped parkways that "were meant to make the experience of driving an automobile a self-contained pleasure, free of resistance" (Sennett 1994, p. 361). People could free themselves from the stresses of the city and stresses of people who lived or acted in a way that was bothersome, offensive, or unclean.

If a city is a multi-cultural place formed by the interactions of many actors, then a level of mobility, that allows people to limit their interactions and connections with the city, threatens the vibrancy and societal health of the city. The "speed, escape, and passivity" promoted by rapid movement, particularly the automobile, and by fragmented geography, encourage people to immediately judge and classify what and who they encounter (Sennett 1994, p. 366). When moving at slower speeds and within a busy, diverse environment, human beings still have the tendency to judge and classify, but the reaction time when walking is greater and the stimuli which must be processed are more numerous, allowing the possibility that a snap judgment will not as easily or

quickly be reached. It is also much more difficult to discern what we believe does or does not belong in a particular setting when that setting is filled with many actors and many uses.

Lurking in the civic problem of a multi-cultural city is the moral difficulty of arousing sympathy for those who are Other. And this can only occur, I believe, by understanding why bodily pain requires a place in which it can be acknowledged, and in which its transcendent origins become visible. Such pain has a trajectory in human experience...the body accepting pain is ready to become a civic body, sensible to the pain of another person, pains present together on the street, at last endurable... (Sennett 1994, p. 376)

Sympathy is impossible if we do not first encounter the pain and existence of others, and, furthermore, empathy, an ability to more fully understand and embody the experience of others, cannot be realized if there is not also an understanding of the pain and existence of oneself.

Freud describes pleasure as a longing for comfort and sensory detachment, unassaulted by pain or struggle, and he envisioned it "like the comfort of a fetus in the womb, safe and unknowing of the world" (Sennett 1994, p. 372). However, civilization and the city opposes our search for comfort with contradictory experiences that we cannot simply ignore or easily remove from view, and these experiences cause us to feel incomplete and uncomfortable (Sennett 1994, p. 372). Sennett believes that it is this cognitive dissonance that makes geographic segregation, isolation, and hyper-mobility in the urban environment so desirable (Sennett 1994, p. 372). It prevents us from having to see and experience the people and places that would otherwise reveal our own pain and struggles which we have sought to suppress by placing ourselves in physical environments or using modes of transportation that limit physical or mental stimulation. The segregated, isolating city impedes human connection and understanding; walking is a means of rebuilding that understanding and centering our concern on the lived experience of human beings.

Understanding the Less-Quantifiable Nature of Walking

Urban planning, as in many fields of study, tends to break the individual into a set of actions and decisions that are then aggregated into trends and behavioral patterns to understand larger groups and subsets of urban society. However, it is important to appreciate the underlying values and individual perceptions of how people engage in urban life rather than simply trying to categorize and generalize.

There has been a growing body of research in recent years focused on the sensory experience in urban environments, or alternatively termed “psycho-geography” (stemming from earlier works of Guy Debord and the Situationists (Micallef 2010)), as a way of describing the “ambience and ‘softer’ dimensions of the city” (Middleton 2010). Through the feelings, tastes, sounds, and associated meanings found in the mundane characteristics in the urban environment, there is much to be learned about humanity, both in a collective understanding of actions but also as individualized meanings that manifests themselves in each person based on how they experience the places and people around them. Some scholars (i.e. Moran, De Certeau) examine the meanings found in everyday life with a broad lens. While others, including Jennie Middleton, a British social and cultural geographer, and Shawn Micallef, an instructor, urbanist, and self-proclaimed, modern-day flâneur in Toronto, seek to understand more individualized details of the psycho-geographic experience that each person has while walking (while still considering the broader experiences that exist in daily life).

Middleton explores walking as an embodied act that frames how an individual experiences the everyday environment that they inhabit. Bonnett, Carmona, and Middleton all draw attention to a need for walking to be understood as a socialized and embodied experience that allows for the exchange of ideas, the expression of self, and also challenging of the current normative rationale of how urban spaces are used.

Furthermore, Middleton challenges the current, rationalized approaches taken by city policymakers to try to understand walking and the role of the pedestrian within the city. She argues that pedestrian counts, models of walking behavior, and attempts to quantify and reduce walkability to a neat and controllable set of principles fall short of capturing the diversity and meaning found in the real, embodied experience of people who walk (Middleton 2010). Part of the reason why much of our current infrastructure lacks (or inadequately provides) a place for pedestrians is because many planners, engineers, and other decision makers are focused on discrete deliverables of walkability: how wide of a sidewalk to build, what type of paint to use, what the appropriate spacing between crosswalks should be, and so forth. This sort of approach to improving walkability, by serving the needs of an anonymous, amalgamated pedestrian, is the same problematic approach that gave us a street network of highly segmented and measured spaces for the automobile and its use. As we seek to more fully understand the embodied nuances of the pedestrian experience, quantitative data (pedestrian counts, etc.) can reveal a part of the picture but are not at all sufficient or ideal for grasping a richer understanding of walking and the human scale of streetscapes. Instead, as Middleton argues, we must understand the individual human experience of people walking before we try to prescribe universal standards or assumptions (2010).

In 2010, Middleton conducted a mixed-method study, using mailed surveys (1,000 sent), photo/written walking diaries (35 participants), and in-depth interviews (35 participants) in the boroughs of Islington and Hackney in London (with the explicit intent of enlisting participants from diverse socio-economic backgrounds/neighborhoods) with three primary objectives: first, to better understand the relationship between walking and the built environment; second, to examine different

types and ways in which people walk; and third, to explore the “social dimensions of urban pedestrian movement” (Middleton 2010, p. 579). Out of these diaries and interviews came detailed accounts of how people perceive their neighborhoods through walking and also how walking incorporates itself into the ritual of their day. The following is a quote from “George”, a resident of Hackney:

Walking allows one to really understand an area. Psycho-geography changes from street to street and this can only be felt on foot. I don't mean to sound mystical about this, the atmosphere on a road or area is made up of hundreds of factors and details which make up a local environment and moving through this space in a car or bus lessens one's sensitivities to senses which pick up on atmosphere. (Middleton 2010, p. 582)

Other journal entries are much more mundane in their response, talking about a skirt that was impractical for walking, a walk from the bus stop carrying too many things, not wearing headphones while walking like one would on the bus, and complaints about people who text while walking and inevitably drift into your path as you try to walk by (Middleton 2010, p. 589). These experiential descriptions of walking demonstrate an “active inhabiting” which walking produces in the urban environment. Through these accounts, there appears to be an understanding of oneself, how one is dressed, or how one is participating in the environment, and also an awareness of the actions of others and how they make the respondent feel.

In his book, *Stroll: Psychogeographic Walking Tours of Toronto*, Shawn Micallef creates detailed descriptions of many of Toronto's streets, neighborhoods, and iconic destinations. However, this is not a tour guide (although one could certainly use it as such); Micallef describes both the subtle and the more obvious elements he encounters: the signage, the people, the history, the personal and collective meanings he sees in places. While seeking to describe the places of Toronto, Micallef does not divorce his own experience from the walk. He takes these walks both alone and with company. He

creates an intimacy found only in weaving his meaning and his history into the places he describes.

There is a growing body of artists, architects, and writers in Toronto that are seeking to rediscover the urban nuances and “the grain” of Toronto (Micallef 2010).

Their typical tactic is the stroll. The typical product of strolling is knowledge that cannot be acquired merely by studying maps, guidebooks and statistics. Rather, it is a matter of the body, knowing the city by pacing off its streets and neighbourhoods, recovering the deep, enduring traces of our inhabitation by encountering directly the fabric of buildings and the legends we have built here during the last two centuries. (Micallef 2010, p. 8)

With Middleton and Micallef as examples, these kinds of interviews, diaries, and descriptions of daily walking help to reveal experiences that are likely identifiable to many people but often not explicitly stated, documented, or are otherwise missed if the city is described only from the experience of driving. While professional urban planners and scholars have not adopted these kinds of detailed interviews or diaries as an approach to understanding walking in every city, these efforts should be increased because they help to reveal the social and psychological meanings that people create when they walk. It is important to understand that walking is not simply a means of travel but a lens through which we form a detailed picture of humanity and the environment around us, thereby building greater social understanding.

Concerning Urban Planning Practice and Culture

Central to the ethics of planners is the purpose to serve the public good (as much as it may be debated how that public service is best accomplished). To “ensure the greatest good for the greatest number of people” (Howe 1994, p. 31), there also must be a sense of *people* and not simply *person*. If one’s lens as a person is simply informed by personal perspective and reinforced by people with similar perspectives, then there

cannot be an understanding of “the greatest number of people”. While there are many ways in which we learn more about the world, others, and ourselves, as urban planners we are tasked with understanding how the urban built environment encourages or inhibits actions which lead to this fuller perspective of “the greatest number of people”. I argue that walking is a critical action that not only serves as a practical means of travelling but also that forms a foundation for how each person processes the city and all that it contains.

A cultural perspective should also inform urban planning’s understanding of walking and its role in the public realm. Modern cultural theory categorizes culture in two primary ways: 1) culture as product of society and 2) culture as a broader, independent social force (Smith and Riley 2009, p. 3). I argue that for urban planners it is useful to view walking in the context of the latter. While the prevalence of or ways of walking indeed can be seen as the result or product of a particular society, walkability can also be seen as a force which drives the formation of social ideas, and as a way in which individuals understand people and phenomena around them. Indeed, all persons are a part of a culture and individually embody a unique expression of that culture(s), and, in the United States, automobile-oriented spatial structures inform a certain kind of culture that is individualistic and detached. However, I would ask us to consider how walking can serve as a certain kind of force that allows a more detailed understanding of the broader cultural forces at work. Walking can be seen as both a force in itself and also as a lens that allows you to understand these social forces. If, in the urban environment, social forces are indeed at play, what then are the most useful means to understand and expose oneself to those forces?

Urban planners have an outsized influence on the formation of the space of the city, and we must consider how people move through the spaces of the city. Urban

planning cannot force someone to believe or behave a certain way, but it can and should promote the ability of people to explore, to walk, and to encounter the other people and places that form their environment.

As an ethical concern, it should be in the purview of planners to create spaces and paths which allow for connection, for interaction, for reflection, for encountering the offensive and the uplifting. History has shown that it is not in the “public interest” to segregate or isolate. Racial covenants, gated communities, and urban interstates never advanced nor intended to advance social understanding or urban integration. Instead, they reflect a “public interest” to not be bothered by the complexities or difficulties of the inequities in society. As urban planners, we should expose, not conceal; connect, not isolate. Walking exposes, walking connects. Walkability therefore becomes an ethical imperative for urban planners, in order to expand societal and personal understanding for “the greatest number of people” and to connect into the marginalized places of society. Unfortunately, “the greatest number of people” currently drives, and therefore they do not have the same potential for social encounters as if they were walking. Again, planners cannot force people to understand themselves or one another, but we can promote the creation of walkable environments that increase the potential for exposure and connection and for a renewed, compassionate humanness.

Urban planning should be a profession focused on the empowerment of people and the public good. This empowerment comes when a person better understands who they are and how they can contribute to the world in which they live. Walking is a piece of that human empowerment.

VI. Conclusion: Walking toward the Good City

Maybe we as urban planners need to stroll more. Maybe we need to get out of the office, take a break from reviewing our large, roll-plot plans, and simply walk and see what we learn. It is ultimately not a planner's responsibility to dictate the experiences that people have in a city while walking. It is however, our responsibility to provide an environment that is safe and enabling for walking, and not an environment that caters to the comfort of driving, understanding that the reason we promote this walkable environment is to allow for the formation of a stronger, inhabited, social-spatial sympathy that people can build only at the pace of walking, standing, sitting, and living embodied in public space.

We operate in a society dominated by the automobile, one that has isolated us, numbed our ability and desire to relate to other people, and created urban environments that make walking very difficult or dangerous. For decades, pedestrians have been pathologized, systematically and culturally viewed with derision or indifference. These perspectives on automobiles and pedestrians are deeply ingrained and will take many years and conscious effort to change.

However, encouragingly, there is a growing movement to remake communities as walkable places. With this, a deeper understanding of the social importance of walking, and the connections and sympathies that it can promote, must be pursued as urban planners seek to create places that best serve the public good. Future research should build on the kinds of sociogeographical interviews and diaries that Middleton used to better understand walking in London. This approach could be expanded to other cities to explore the highly personal, yet also collective, walking experience of individuals in their social-spatial contexts. Another valuable lens of research, coming from feminist and queer studies' academic traditions (Chauncey 1994), should more

closely examine the role of the body in space while walking, and, furthermore, how walking in urban spaces is a means of expression and of embodied understanding. Additional research could include cultural analyses of cities and neighborhoods in the United States (and abroad) specifically aimed at discerning the underlying values that shape people's perceptions of and engagements with walking.

From Thoreau and Rousseau who walked to understand Nature and self-love, to Sandercock, Middleton, Sennett (and many others) who see walking as a part of an engaged urban habitation in the multi-cultural city, walking serves as a critical lens through which we understand other people, the environment (both built and natural), and ourselves.

Urban planning should be a profession focused on the empowerment of people and the public good. This empowerment comes when a person better understands who they are and how they can contribute to the world in which they live. Walking is a piece of that human empowerment.

To conclude, I'd like to turn to a quote from Shawn Micallef,

...but I kept walking, and trying to figure out how this city works, who's here, how it's all put together, what's a street or two over, where the curve in the road leads and, ultimately, what Toronto means. I'll likely never completely figure out that last point, so I'll keep walking (2010, p. 10).

We probably won't ever fully understand and capture the meaning of the places, the people, and the facets of our own selves that we encounter while walking through the city. May we walk nevertheless, walking with the intent to inhabit our cities and our streets so that we will hopefully grasp a little more of the character and complexities of this world than if we had never walked at all.

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